

THE LABOUR UPRISING OF 1924- A PROBE

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Abstract: This study analyses the labour uprising in the Jammu and Kashmir State and its varied repercussions. For the first time the labourers stirred in an open revolt against the oppressive behaviour of the officials and protested against the working conditions of the factory. This paper is an endeavour to depict the labour unrest due to genre glitches of labourers like poverty, backwardness, illiteracy, insufficiency of wages, corruption of the officials and oppression of the scrutinizing staff. The article enumerates the significance of the agitation, modes of protests, meetings, petitions, grievances and tussle for their rights which equip grounds for other labour movements in the state. The Muslim organisation inside and outside the state support and promulgates its compass till it burst in the form of labour uprising. A brief sketch of the evolution of class consciousness among the labourers had been established which set an example for the downtrodden masses to fight for their rights. The agitation was an eruption against the existing economic organisation of the state and their anguish against the princely rule of the state.

Key Words: Labour, Silk, Factory, wages, officials and grievances.

INTRODUCTION:

The Non-Cooperation and the Khilafat movement had a dominant landmark in the annals of Jammu and Kashmir history. Subsequently the Khilafat movement, the labour uprising of silk factory manifest another imperative milestone in the people's history of Jammu and Kashmir. The Khilafat agitation had already permeated an essence of graciousness in the Muslim masses of Kashmir and they rendered for the evolution of other movements. The spirit of mobility was showed by the workers of the Government owned Silk factory in their struggle against socio-economic grievances. The Muslims of Kashmir had a number of grievances and feeling of restlessness due to the factor that other communities were progressing and advanced in education. The workers of the silk factory had constantly been complaining against the inadequacy of remuneration, the exploitation of the officials and the tyranny of the inspecting staff¹. The labourers of this factory were paid daily wages of 41/2annas per head which was perceptibly too scarce, especially in view of the escalating of cost of living and the huge profit it grossed. The corruption was so widespread that the non-Hindus officials shamelessly pocketed even a part of their wages. The contention of these labourers was that in addition to their low wages, they were insulted by the officials who demanded bribes from them and made them work in their houses like servants. Besides, the silk factory of Srinagar also remained closed for two or three months in a year for which no wages were paid to the workers. In order to cause the authorities to meet their demands, the workers of the factory struck work for many days in 1924. The programme of action included the holding of meeting and taking out of processions. On the 12th of July 1924, the *Anjunman-i-Nusrat-ul-Islam* (formed in 1905 by Mirwaiz Moulvi Rasool Shah for socio-religious reforms, mutual cooperation and unity) summoned a public meeting to pray to god for the welfare and good health of Raja Hari Singh who was confined to sick bed². On the same day, the labourers of the silk factory took out a procession with a view to joining this public meeting. No untoward thing happened, and the government took no action against the processionists.

Even when in 1924, there was strike in the silk factory at Srinagar; the leaders of the agitation condemned the Maharaja by charging that one of the factors accountable for the strike was his educational policy. Maharaja Pratap Singh was the only target of attack of whom they considered a foreigner and exploiter³. In July 1924, when the members of the salary commission paid a visit to the silk factory, the labourers struck work and sat in front of the factory. The director asked them to go to their work and to allow the members of the above commission a chance to inspect the same, but all his warmth proved in vain⁴.

The labourers demanded immediate redress on their grievances. The members of the commission returned and all the labourers went to Hazuri Bagh Srinagar where, after due consultations, they went to Gupkar to approached the

higher authorities for redress of their grievances. On July 19, 1924, the District Magistrate was told at Gupkar, Srinagar by the members of Commerce and Industries, that the situation had grown very serious in the silk factory and had actually resulted in breach of peace in the form of assaults being committed on sericulture officials and that their lives and property were in danger⁵. As the situation was reported to be perilous and the attitude of the labourers threatening, immediate steps were taken by the District Magistrate, Mr Glancy and the other members of the council to clear the factory of the labourers without to be moved to the Silk factory. The Colonel Commandant was requested to place the Infantry and the cavalry in immediate charge of the factory, so that the labourers might create no further mischief. This action taken by the government was simply meant to prevent the workers from taking out a procession according to their schedule programme so that they should not join the public meeting which was to be addressed the same day by Khwaja Kamal-ud-din, the Head of the Ahmadiya community⁶. On 20 July, twenty-five persons out of twenty-seven were arrested quietly and without any demonstration. Out of those arrested, twenty one were taken to the central jail, in Srinagar, an only four were put in custody at the Sher garhi police station. In the morning, a crowd of two thousand people assembled opposite to the Sher garhi police station and attempted to enter the station by force in order to rescue the prisoners. They insisted on the immediate release of the accused. The cavalry troops were ordered to disperse the mob, as a result of which ten were killed and twenty were injured. The wounded were taken to the Mission hospital by the people and corpses of those killed were taken in a lorry by the sepoy. The entire city was handed over to the military. Some rioters were arrested and handed over by the military by the police, to be dealt with according to law⁷.

The people were ordered to keep the peace. Mirwaiz Moulvi Ahmad Ullah Shah, Mirwaiz Hamadani, Munshi Assad-ullah, Mirza Ghulam Mustafa, Khawaja Shah Naqshbandhi, Doctor Abdul Wahid, Budhe Khan, Mohi-ud-din kawoosa, etc. were instructed to see that the peace and order was maintained by the Muslims⁸. After the trouble was over, the British Resident desired some of the educated workers of the silk factory to be promoted to posts of responsibility. The Resident in Kashmir in its letter to political secretary to Government of India wrote; "the situation is well in hand and no further trouble is likely to occur. But it will be desirable that effective steps would be taken to remedy any real grievances and to promote some of the educated Musalman workers to posts of responsibility"⁹. The Muslim population of Srinagar sturdily objected to the action of the authorities and send a number of telegrams to the viceroy expressing their resentment against the government. On 22 July 1924, the Muslims of the state send a letter to the viceroy. The state government was condemned for its action against the silk factory labourers not only within the state, but also outside the state¹⁰. On August 5 1924, the secretary of Muslim Kashmiri conference in its telegram to the Resident in Kashmir expressed. Distressing news about Srinagar disturbances caused widespread alarm. Muslim Kashmiri conference requested appointment of enquiry committee immediately consisting of officials and non-officials including conference representative to investigate and report into causes and results of disturbances¹¹. The local Khilafat committee Lahore summoned a public meeting in this connection on August 13, 1924 under the Presidentship of Gulam Mohi-ud-din Qasuri. The meeting was attended by the thousands of people. The meeting had been held to sympathise with the labourers of Silk factory of Kashmir who died in the agitation. The committee condemned the action of the government and demanded the appointment of a commission of inquiry to investigate the real causes of the affairs and circumstances to open fire on peace-loving and innocent labourers. As a result the Kashmir Muslim submitted a representation to Lord Reading, the then viceroy of India who visited the state in 1924¹². The memorandum contained the demands as follows;

1. The grant of proprietary rights of the land to the Muslim peasants that were forcibly snatched from them.
2. The proportionate representation of the Muslims in the state council according to their population.
3. The grant of adequate representation to the Muslims in the state services in order to give to them effective representation. In future all vacancies be made available to them, and in case the Muslims were requisite qualifications were not locally available, the opportunity should be made available to the outsider Muslims of the adjoining states till such time as the local talent was available.
4. The appointment of an important tribunal to enquire in to the complaints and to award punishment to weed out corruption from state services.
5. The appointment of the Muslims on the important posts of the governor, superintendent of police, Assistant superintendent of customs and in case the Muslims with requisite qualifications were not available, the Englishmen be appointed on these posts.

6. The appointment of a tribunal consisting of at least two judges, one of whom was to be an English to conduct the trial of the labourers of the silk factory¹³.
7. The liquidation of the department of shali (unhusked rice) and the removal of restrictions on the import of food grains and restriction of food rationing to the poor people in Srinagar in order to reduce the burden of the peasants who were to pay the revenues in the form of shali.
8. The appointment of the Muslims or the English expert in education, introduction of compulsory free primary education, appointment of the more Muslim teachers, inspectors then the Hindu and the grant of scholarships to the Muslims for acquiring higher education in India and abroad.
9. The abolition of the forced labour and its replacement by the contractual labour.
10. The restoration of land of their respective owners from whom it was illegally seized.
11. The appointment of an elected legislative assembly for drafting a constitution for the state and the grant of adequate representation to the Muslims in it.
12. The grant of contracts, particularly those relating to forests, roads and construction to state subjects national in general and to the Muslims in particular.
13. The restoration of mosques and religious properties to the Muslims, which was hitherto under the control of the Government and, thus, protection from encroachment by the non-Muslims.
14. The appointment of a board consisting of the Muslims to administer the funds spent on the repairs of Jama Masjid and other historical shrines.
15. The appointment of a commission composed of the European officers to inquire into the grievances of the Muslims concerning the Zuljinnah procession, the incident at Khangah-i-shah Hamadan and those relating to Islamabad and Baramullah.
16. The state Resident was responsible for the plight of the Muslims as their rights were insecure and trampled down by the local authorities.

REPERCUSSIONS OF UPRISING:

Lord Reading forwarded the memorandum to the State Government¹⁴. The Maharaja presented it to the State Council for its consideration. The council appointed a three members commission of the British civil services to enquire into the allegation and demands of the memorandum envisaged. Mr B.J. Glancy headed the commission besides a Muslim and a Hindu member. The commission enquired and reported against the demands of the Muslims and founded that the grievances were baseless and because representative institutions were at time considered beyond practical politics. The limited availability of the qualified Muslims was resulted in their restricted admission to the state services. Their demand for proprietary rights was dismissed¹⁵. This memorandum achieved nothing for the Muslims. However, it certainly gave a fillip to their movement to put forth their demands in an organized manner. The signatories of the memorandum such as Mirwaiz Ahmaddullah, Mirwaz Hamadani, Mufti Sharif-ud-din, Saad-ud-din Shawl, Hassan Shah Jalali, and Khawaja Hassan Shah Naqshabandi were taken to task¹⁶. The memorandum did not serve any useful purpose; on the contrary, it earned the displeasure of the members of State Council for their signatures. The Government exiled Khwaja Saad-ud-din shawl to Rawalpindi on the ground of treason. The expulsion of Khwaja created considerable reaction and much resentment among the Muslims and they sent another representation to the Viceroy¹⁷. The Government dismissed Noor Shah Naqshabandi, a Tehsildar on the charges of intrigue. The Jagir of Hassan Shah Naqshabandi was confiscated and was deprived of a cash assignment earlier made to the family for working in Bukhara and Hassan Shah Jalali, the secretary of the group was deported. The punishment given to the participants to the memorandum aroused outrage and antagonism within the state and outside it. The Youngman's Muslim association, Jammu held its annual conference on the 7th march to 9th march 1925. The persons who attended the meeting were Hassan Nizami of Delhi, Moulvi Azamatullah of Lahore and Moulvi Mohd of Kashmir. The meeting condemned the action taken by the State Government against the memorialists¹⁸. The Anjuman-i-Kashmiri Musalmanan, Gojranwala, criticised the State Government for its action against the memorialists. Similarly, the Youngmen's Muslim Association of Gujarat expressed its anger and regret at the action of the State Government. In the meantime, on 23rd September 1925, Maharaja Hari Singh succeeded to the throne after the death of Maharaja Partap Singh. Immediately after his accession to the throne the young Maharaja started taking independent decisions. He lifted the ban on Saad-ud-din Shawl and permitted him to return home, the jagir (A land given by the state to an individual, called a Jagirdar, for a limited time period and held the right to assess and collect land

revenue and other taxes of this land) of Naqshbandi was restored and the ban on the other memorialists was also lifted¹⁹.

CONCLUSION:

The labour turbulence of 1924 was primarily an endeavour by the Silk Factory labourers to get their economic grievances redressed. The labourer's plea and petitions were debarred by the Maharaja government and their agitation was pressed with heavy hands. The labour movement in the Jammu and Kashmir State may be said to have originated in 1965 when the Shawl-bafs rose against the oppressive system of the Shawl industry but the Silk Agitation provides a road to the labourers for their economic grumbles ratified. This uprising was beneficial as it provides attention of the government to the labour conditions. Moreover the labourers were linked with major and minor organisations inside and outside the State to appeal their conditions and complaints. The remarking feature of this agitation was that besides the labourers poverty, backwardness and illiteracy, they had organised themselves without unions and addressed their pitiable conditions. However the agitation later got communal fervour because it was twisted by the Muslim organisations. The labourers who were mostly Muslims took the appeal only on communal grounds and reflect to unravel the problems mere on unorganised manner. But the significant part of it was that it bestowed the flaws of labourers to get organised, coherent and planned for other moments which later comes after a decade in the form of Mazdoor Sabha and led the labourers to new magnitudes of their rights.

REFERENCES:

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2. Silk Factory Labourers had gone on strike on 26th March, 1920 for demanding an increase in their wages. They assembled in the Hazuri Bagh, Srinagar and went in a procession to represent their grievances to Residency in Kashmir, where they were intercepted by the police. These workers then sent a petition to the Chief Minister in which they complained that instead of being increased their wages had been decreased. The workers also demanded an increased in their wages. From Jammu and Kashmir Archives, File no. 26/Rs. 6 of 1920. Also See in Ganai,Muhammed Yusuf, *Kashmir's struggle for Independence Srinagar*, Delhi 2001, pp-62-63.
3. OM.Hari, *Muslims of Jammu and Kashmir*, A study in the spread of education and consciousness (1857-1925), New Delhi 1986, p.148.
4. The secret abstract of Intelligence for the year 1924, Jammu and Kashmir Archives, File no. B of 1924.
5. Kaur,Ravinderjit, *Political Awakening in Kashmir*, New Delhi 2001, p.114.
6. The labourers gave out open threats that they would set fire to the houses of some officers of the Department and would not spare their persons too if they could catch hold of them. Communications of the office with outside were cut off and it became impossible even to send a message to the District Magistrate or the police. Deputy Director of Sericulture to the District Magistrate, Kashmir, 19th July 1924.
7. District Magistrate, Kashmir to the Resident in Kashmir, 21st July 1924.
8. Kaur.Ravinderjit, *Political Awakening in Kashmir*, New Delhi 2001, p.114.
9. G.H Khan, *Freedom Movement in Kashmir*, New Delhi 1980, p.87
10. Jammu and Kashmir Archives, File No-82/M-92of year 1924.
11. Kaur.Ravinderjit, *Political Awakening in Kashmir*, New Delhi 2001, p.113.
12. General Secretary, All India Muslim Kashmiri conference, Lahore to the First Assistant to the Resident in Kashmir, 18th August 1924. Also See, File no-82/M-92 of 1924, State Archives Repository.
13. File no-T/81 of 1924, State Archives Repository. Srinagar Riot Enquiry Committee Report pp.28-29, State Archives Repository.
14. After the Silk Factory agitation, the labour leaders under detention were tried, and on 19th September 1924, the judgment was pronounced at the central jail, Srinagar.14 of them were awarded 6 months imprisonment. But the Muslims of Kashmir protested against the judgement. File no-T/81 of 1924, State Archives Repository.
15. Kaur.Ravinderjit, *Political Awakening in Kashmir*, New Delhi 2001, p.129.
16. Raghwan,G.S, *The warning of Kashmir*, Allahabad 1931, p.63.
17. Handa, R.L, *History of freedom struggle in princely states*, pp.249-250.
18. Extract from confidential diary of the Superintendent of police, Kashmir province, period ending 4th April 1925, File .NO-G/102 of 1924-25, State Archives Repository.
19. Kaur.Ravinderjit, *Political Awakening in Kashmir*, New Delhi 2001, p.114.